

Week of December 9, 2002: MDOT Flash Facts

Topic: Traffic Control Devices

General Facts and Openers:

Nearly 1/3 of all Maine crashes occur at intersections.

There are over 600 signalized intersections in Maine, where in the last three years:

- There were 10,000 crashes resulting in 6 fatalities and nearly 5,000 injuries.
- There were nearly 200 pedestrian and bicycle crashes.

Driver errors noted in crashes at Maine signalized intersections during the last three years include:

- Over 1,200 drivers were reported as disregarding the traffic control device.
- About 3,300 drivers were reported as being distracted or inattentive.
- Nearly 2,100 drivers failed to yield the right of way.
- Over 1,100 drivers were following too closely; and
- Nearly 400 were traveling at illegal or unsafe speed.

Intersections can be hectic -- Motorists are turning, pedestrians are crossing, drivers are checking street signs, and deciding if they should go or stop. It is definitely not the place to make assumptions about what will happen.

Monday:

Tips:

At intersections with traffic signals, do not assume that:

- the light will stay green until you reach it.
 - the driver ahead will proceed without stopping.
 - those having the red light are going to stop.
 - "right on red" is automatic. (There may be signs prohibiting it, traffic may be too heavy, pedestrians or bicycles may be crossing.)
 - that the other vehicle is going to do what the signal indicates.
- Be alert at these intersections, watching:
- the traffic signal (if it has been green for a while, be prepared to stop).
 - traffic activity in all directions.
 - for bicycles and pedestrians.
- Be ready to make quick, smooth, and safe adjustments. (As you approach an intersection, keep your foot over the brake, so you can quickly react to changing situations. Get into the correct lane as early as possible.)

Here is what to do at traffic signals:

- Green Light: Go (But make sure the way is safe and clear. Turn only if permitted-and check for pedestrians before proceeding into the turn.)
- Steady Yellow Light: Take warning, a red light will be shown immediately. (The yellow light is designed to clear the intersection before the red light.)
- Steady Red Light: STOP. Do not enter the cross-walk or intersection. (Right turn is permitted after STOPPING, unless posted otherwise, but only after you yield to pedestrians and other traffic.)

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- Left Turn Arrows: Proceed on green arrow, yield on green “ball” light and yellow arrow, stop on red arrow or red “ball” light.
- Red Right Turn Arrow: Stop. There is **no** right-on-red allowed after stopping.

Right Turn on Red:

- Is NOT permitted at some intersections (watch for signs that prohibit Right on Red).
- Must come to a full STOP first.
- Yield to all through traffic and pedestrians, especially pedestrians and bicycles on the right. (People tend to look left for approaching traffic and ignore the bike and pedestrian that may be on the right.)
- Proceed right only if normal flow of through traffic will not be interrupted.

Wednesday

Tips:

Some intersections have flashing beacon controls.

A flashing “Yellow” signal means that traffic shall slow down and proceed through the intersection with caution.

A flashing “Red” signal means traffic shall come to a full stop (before a crosswalk or stop line, if one is present). Before proceeding through or making a turn, position the vehicle so you have a good view of the intersecting roadway traffic. Proceed only when it is safe and watch for potential conflicts with the car at the opposite leg of the intersection as well.

To avoid an intersection crash:

- Keep focused on the driving task. (scan ahead watching for signals, signs, traffic, proper lane position, pedestrian and bicycle activity)
- Use lane position and turn signals to ‘show’ others where you’re going.
- Carefully check other traffic movements, and yield when appropriate.
- Check all lanes for possible traffic conflicts. (A person waving you through a left turn may mean well but may not be aware of an oncoming vehicle in the other lane.)
- Yield the right of way. (to traffic, pedestrians, and bicyclists)

Friday

Tips:

Regulatory signs are critical guides for safe driving behavior. They direct how to approach an intersection or how fast to go. At intersections without traffic lights, you will encounter stop or yield signs. At a Stop Sign, stop before the crosswalk or at the stop line. If neither of these are present, stop at a point nearest the intersection without going into the intersection to allow you to see approaching traffic on the intersecting roadway.

Four Way Stops-Every vehicle must come to a stop. Wait your turn. Eye contact and positive communication are needed here. When two people approach an intersection at the same time, the vehicle on the right has the right of way.

Yield Signs-Slow down and wait for through traffic to clear on the road you are entering or crossing. Give the right of way to all vehicles and pedestrians.

To avoid an intersection crash:

- When making a left turn, keep your wheels straight until you proceed into the turn, as a rear-end collision could send you into the opposing lane.
- Maintain a safe following distance. (Do not assume what the vehicle ahead is going to do and start to move before they do.)
- Slow down and be ready to stop.
- Don't delay – when it's your turn to legally and safely do so, proceed through the intersection at a safe speed without delaying those behind you.

People going straight through an intersection have the right-of-way before any vehicles turning left.